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SIPDIS

STATE FOR NEA, NEA/IPA, NEA/PPD

WHITE HOUSE FOR PRESS OFFICE, SIT ROOM
NSC FOR NEA STAFF

SECDEF WASHDC FOR USDP/ASD-PA/ASD-ISA
HQ USAF FOR XXXX
DA WASHDC FOR SASA
JOINT STAFF WASHDC FOR PA
USCINCENT MACDILL AFB FL FOR POLAD/USIA ADVISOR
COMSOCEUR VAIHINGEN GE FOR PAO/POLAD
COMSIXTHFLT FOR 019

JERUSALEM ALSO FOR ICD
LONDON ALSO FOR HKANONA AND POL
PARIS ALSO FOR POL
ROME FOR MFO

E.O. 12958: N/A
TAGS: [IS](#) [KMDR](#) [MEDIA](#) [REACTION](#) [REPORT](#)
SUBJECT: ISRAEL MEDIA REACTION

SUBJECTS COVERED IN THIS REPORT:

Mideast

Key stories in the media:

Ha'aretz reports that according to the 2006 national security strategy published by the White House, Iran is the biggest threat to the world.

Yesterday the Jerusalem Post reported that Israel will not cut off water, gas or electricity to the Palestinian Authority even after Hamas forms a government.

Israel Radio this morning quoted Hamas leader and Palestinian Prime Minister designate Ismail Haaniyah as saying in an interview with CBS News that he has never personally ordered a terrorist action against Israel and that he hopes to ultimately reach a peace deal with Israel.

Media reported that the GSS (Israeli Security Agency) fears that terror groups will try to assassinate senior officials in response to the Jericho operation. Ha'aretz reported that the IDF's biggest concern is that Fatah activists have taken Hamas's place in executing terrorist attacks.

Maariv cites Syrian President Bashar Assadi as saying in an interview with the British Sky news that Syria is essential to the peace process in the Middle East. He was also cited as saying that the US did not succeed in isolating Syria.

Israel Radio and Yediot reported that UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan has spoken to Syrian President Assad and asked him to do all he can in order to calm the tension with Israel along the northern border.

All media reported that following consultations, State Prosecutor Eran Shendar concluded that Israel has a right to try Ze'evi's killers who were apprehended in the Jericho operation.

The Jerusalem Post published an exclusive report identifying what seems to be the first crack in the formal EU position against contact with Hamas, the EU's Euro-Mediterranean Parliamentary Assembly (EMPA) intends to host at least one newly elected member from Hamas.

All media reported in their international sections that the US is willing to hold talks with Iran regarding Iraq provided that the discussions are restricted to that topic alone.

The Jerusalem Post reported that the High Court of Justice has rejected Palestinian petitions against the route of the security fence saying that the path gives the proper balance between Israel's security interests and the Palestinians' well-being.

Israel Radio reported that the Ministry of Agriculture

has ordered the slaughter of tens of thousands of birds suspected of being infected with the deadly H5N1 strain of bird flu. The Health Ministry confirmed suspicions that the virus has reached Israel, after more than 16,000 birds died this week.

The media reported that the IDF soldier that was killed on Thursday may have died from friendly fire.

Mideast:

Summary:

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "There is no way Israel is going to achieve permanent borders without an agreement with the Palestinians and an American commitment to wipe out those Qassam rocket launchers, for example, or any other weapons of destruction aimed at Israel after it has cleared out of most of the territories. The big unknown is whether Olmert is capable at this point in time of picking up where Sharon left off."

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz: "Livni has stated that Abbas is not relevant as far as she is concerned, but Washington feels committed to him. The fear in the United States is that his fall will be the end of the road map peace plan, and even the end of the vision of President George Bush as outlined in his June 2002 speech."

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv: "James Wolfenson is on the verge of leaving the region. The Europeans are desperate. Wolfenson said last week that he estimates that 'In two years the world will lose interest in what is happening here and withdraw.' Anyone who thinks it's for the best, might be proven wrong quicker than he thinks."

Block Quotes:

I. "Olmert zig or Olmert zag"

Senior columnist and longtime dove Yoel Marcus wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (March 17): "The lightness in which Olmert promises to create in four years a fun living country is surprising. It is unclear how, who, when and in what way does he plan to implement such a presumptuous goal. It took years before Sharon, the settler of all settlers, could bring himself to say things like: 'We had a dream but it's gone now.... Complete disengagement is not realistic.... There is no way Israel is going to achieve permanent borders without an agreement with the Palestinians and an American commitment to wipe out those Qassam rocket launchers, for example, or any other weapons of destruction aimed at Israel after it has cleared out of most of the territories. The big unknown is whether Olmert is capable at this point in time of picking up where Sharon left off. His career, up until now, has been helped along by chance and a large dose of luck.... As a politician all these years, Olmert has done okay. If he got into trouble, he got out of it. He has been an MK, a mayor and a minister.... What Olmert has going for him today as head of Kadima, 11 days before the elections, is Sharon's legacy and a lot of luck. As for the rest, we'll have to wait and see."

II. "Where to draw the line"

Senior columnist and chief defense commentator Zeev Schiff wrote in independent, left-leaning Ha'aretz (March 17): "There is no disagreement today among the top levels of the Israeli government, which view a Hamas government as illegitimate, that Israel will oppose attempts by international bodies to cooperate with such a government. The developing disagreement with the U.S. administration is not related to a government led by Hamas, which is perceived as a terrorist organization, but to the attitude that should be taken to the presidency of Mahmoud Abbas (Abu Mazen). Livni has stated that Abbas is not relevant as far as she is concerned, but Washington feels committed to him. The fear in the United States is that his fall will be the end of the road map peace plan, and even the end of the vision of President George Bush as outlined in his June 2002 speech.... Hamas leader Khaled Meshal has declared that his organization will not put its political policy on the block in return for

donations from the international community. Reality will no doubt persuade him that things are not as simple as that. Israel must also assume that economic pressure is not the only key to influencing the Palestinians.... It ... turns out that it is extremely difficult to set a correct dose of sanctions, and, above all, that it is almost impossible to differentiate between economic sanctions against the PA and sanctions against the Palestinian public."

III. "Desperation"

Diplomatic correspondent Ben Caspit wrote in popular, pluralist Maariv (March 17): "The Jericho operation this week was blown out of proportion.... Tactically Olmert registered victory. Strategically? It depends from where you're looking. It could be that we have been losing for several years now, an ongoing loss, hurtful, irreversible.... In an historic view the Jericho event will be seen as another big step on the way of the almost final archiving of the Palestinian option.... Abu Mazen never looked more pathetic. He has earned that patheticness rightfully but we stand with him aboard the leaking pathetic ship deck.... When the land is piled up with Hamas and then Al Qaida, we will all be yearning. James Wolfenson is on the verge of leaving the region. The Europeans are desperate. Wolfenson said last week that he estimates that 'In two years the world will lose interest in what is happening here and withdraw.' Anyone who thinks it's for the best, might be proven wrong quicker than he thinks."

JONES